

exact studies of stimulation have now been made by observing and recording the reactions of beating hearts to drugs, such as adrenaline, etc., and these show that the stimulation of a beating heart is an entirely different process from that of exciting quiescent nerve or muscle with electric currents. There is, however, no doubt that the stimulation of a beating heart by drugs and hormones is a natural stimulation. Hence the conclusion that there must either be two kinds of natural stimulation, or else age-long tradition has led physiologists in particular to believe that they were studying as natural stimulation what is a laboratory artefact. The behaviour of naturally stimulated tissues confirms the conclusion concerning the artefact. This further implies that any explanation of natural stimulation based on such phenomena as the chronaxie, etc., can be reasonably assumed to be invalid.—I am, etc.,

September 7th.

W. BURRIDGE.

### Stress of Homework

SIR,—Dr. Brockbank, in his valuable article on homework, in the *Journal* of September 19th (p. 587), hardly touches on what appears to me to be the main factor in overwork in young people. Stress arises mainly because the work is too difficult, and therefore uninteresting. It is the amount of worry connected with the work rather than the amount of time spent over it that is apt to affect the general mental and nervous condition of school children.—I am, etc.,

C. R. COOKE-TAYLOR, D.P.M., M.R.C.S.  
London, W.1, Sept. 19th.

### Mechanized Medicine

SIR,—I am all in favour of complete candour among ourselves as regards professional matters, and I have no reason to doubt that "Juvenis" is sincere in his opinion about the panel system and as to the methods adopted in his practice. But I should be very sorry—and indeed I refuse—to believe that his experience is typical. I have had the good fortune to come in close contact with many busy insurance practitioners who have never had any doubt as to their ability to give their panel patients that which they contract to give—namely, a good general practitioner service.

"Juvenis" tells us that the majority of panel patients do not get that full examination they ought to have, because he hasn't the time to do it. His surgery hours are "cluttered up" with patients who have to be "rushed through." Why? The average panel list is 1,000. Each insured person requires an average of about five services a year. That is to say that the thousand require 5,000 services in a year. Let us state "Juvenis's" problem at its worst and divide this by 300 days (leaving out Sundays and public holidays). This means some sixteen services daily. Of these, say, six would entail home visits, leaving ten to be given at the surgery. Some of these latter would be routine, such as certification and renewal of prescriptions. Only a few would be new cases. Where is the need for any "rush"? Assume that the doctor has twice as much private work—and this is not by any means always the case; that gives us a daily total of eighteen home visits and thirty surgery services daily divided into two or three sessions. I submit that in a *well-organized practice* every patient needing it could have the thorough examination that he or she ought to have. In times of epidemics, of course, all patients have to take what it is possible to give, but in many cases detailed examination can be deferred for a time.

I should like to hear what some of my old friends think of "Juvenis's" dilemma. The matter is one of great importance. Consciously or otherwise he is giving a handle to those ill-informed or malicious critics who have for so long worked this fable about "queues of panel patients," etc., for so much more than it is worth. I believe it to be a gross libel on our system, and on the majority of the doctors working it. If it were true that the conditions of national health insurance make it impossible to give what every patient has a right to expect, it would mean that many thousands of general practitioners in this country are complacent parties to a fraud on the public and an organized insult to the honourable traditions of our profession. I have always understood that *every* patient who entrusts himself to the doctor of his choice can confidently expect the best that that doctor can give him. So I particularly dislike the snobbish assumption running through the letter of "Juvenis" that there is some subtle difference between the private and the "panel and parish" patients. Surely, before Heaven and the doctor we are all equal!—I am, etc.,

London, W.1, Sept. 26th.

ALFRED COX.

### Traumatic Oedema

SIR,—I have read with interest Dr. L. C. Hill's article on traumatic oedema in your issue of September 26th. No mention is made of the most useful form of treatment in such cases as he describes—namely, infra-red irradiation.

It is a sweeping and incorrect statement to make, that "the application of physiotherapy at any period other than in the very late stages is unjustifiable." American, Continental, and English observers who have used infra-red irradiation in cases of traumatic oedema have proved its worth times without number, particularly in the early stages. I would therefore cordially recommend Dr. Hill to substitute this form of treatment for some of the methods he has used without success.—I am, etc.,

London, W.1, Sept. 25th.

W. ANNANDALE TROUP.

### Measures for Relief in Spain

SIR,—The condition of the sick and wounded of the fighting forces on both sides in the Spanish civil war, and of the distressed civilian population congregated in the war areas of that country, is such as to make all who desire to relieve human suffering eager to do something to provide the relief so urgently needed. To attempt in this letter to describe the prevailing conditions would be redundant, as our newspapers are keeping this country fully informed of the appalling and heart-rending situation in Spain.

The International Red Cross Committee at Geneva recently sent a representative to Spain, and he has been able to conclude an agreement with the Government at Madrid and with the Junta at Burgos whereby both sides in the civil war in Spain undertake to respect the Geneva Convention and the Red Cross emblem and to accept the much-needed assistance of the Red Cross societies of the world. Representatives of the International Red Cross Committee are proceeding to Barcelona, Madrid, Burgos, and Seville to establish relief services. This relief will be given impartially to the sick and suffering of both combatant forces, and to the sick, needy, and homeless of the civil population who are suffering so cruelly.

The British Red Cross Society earnestly and urgently appeals to the British public to provide by generous donations of money the means whereby the practical sympathy of this country can go out to those who are in such dire distress in Spain. The British Red Cross